

## **In 2015, county focused on improvements, planning**

By Ray Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

As we close out 2015, I'd like to review the many policy changes and programs adopted this year in fulfillment of the Board of County Commissioners' strategic plan.

### **Scrub jay plan**

In February, the board adopted a Habitat Conservation Plan to address the impact of development on endangered Florida scrub-jays. The plan, which includes a 30-year incidental take permit, allows owners of scrub-jay land to begin construction under a lower-cost countywide permit, while conserving habitat for the federally protected jays.

The eight-year HCP effort is ongoing, with staff currently reviewing the fee structure to fairly spread the cost of implementing the plan among property owners.

### **Utilities audit**

Following an operational audit by consultant KPMG, Utilities Department staff embarked on a year-long, and ongoing, implementation of more than 40 recommendations to improve customer service, long-term capital planning, procedures, training, policies and communication. Among the improvements was the creation of a customer knowledge base, which enables service representatives to quickly respond to questions on a wide range of utilities issues. The knowledge base will be expanded to other county departments in the future.

Even as the Utilities Department conducted this extensive operational and management overhaul, it was recognized by the Florida Section of the American Water Works Association with its Water Distribution System of the Year Award.

### **Road work**

Drivers this year no doubt noticed a number of road projects under construction. While this work, including the widening of Edgewater and Midway boulevards and Gasparilla and Burnt Store roads, has created some temporary inconveniences, the finished projects – all approved by voters through the local option sales tax – will improve traffic circulation and enhance safety. A fourth major road project, the extension of Winchester Boulevard from State Road 776 to Placida Road, was completed earlier this year, marking the fulfillment of another sales tax promise to voters.

### **Planning**

In addition to a strategy focused on providing human services, improving quality of life, enhancing public safety, managing growth, promoting economic development, protecting water resources and operating county government as efficiently and effectively as possible, the BCC has stressed fiscal and financial planning. The county is now in year two of its second two-year

budget cycle, which provides long-term planning and near-term flexibility while maintaining a strong financial position.

This approach includes creating master plans stretching far into the future for parks, utilities, transit, facilities, public works and other county departments. While the costs of identified capital improvements may be daunting, long-term infrastructure planning allows the board to solicit resident input, prioritize projects and identify funding options.

### **Televised meetings**

To increase public engagement, CC-TV added two board meetings – the Planning and Zoning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals – to its regular schedule. CC-TV also broadcasts BCC meetings and Code Enforcement Special Magistrate meetings live, and other recorded meetings such as the Punta Gorda City Council and the Construction Industry Licensing Board. A late-night rebroadcast of BCC meetings, starting at 11 p.m. on Wednesdays, was recently added.

CC-TV can be found on Comcast channel 20 (channel 97 in some areas south of Punta Gorda) and CenturyLink® Prism™ TV channel 96.

CC-TV is looking for residents' input about its programming. To take a quick survey, go to [charlottecountyfl.com/cctv](http://charlottecountyfl.com/cctv) and click the survey link.

### **County app**

To further improve customer service and responsiveness, the county has made it easier for you to contact staff, report problems or ask questions using the new Charlotte County app, which has been downloaded nearly 1,000 times since its launch earlier this year. Users can report potholes, overgrown brush, downed signs or other issues directly from their phones.

A notification function was recently activated to share important county information with users and a new widget to be launched next year will allow you to reserve a ride with Charlotte County Transit or update existing service requests.

To download the free app, search your smart phone's app store for "Charlotte County FL."

*Ray Sandrock is the Charlotte County administrator. Readers may reach him at [raymond.sandrock@charlottecountyfl.gov](mailto:raymond.sandrock@charlottecountyfl.gov).*